

President Obama's first big initiative, the \$819 billion stimulus package, passed the House with little difficulty by 244-188.

But no GOP lawmakers voted for it, despite Obama's efforts to create a bipartisan atmosphere. Also, more economists are arguing that the measure would be ineffective.

Even some Democrats expressed doubts.

"I am going to support the package. There's a lot of good in it for future economic growth," said Rep. Dan Boren, D-Okla. "But it's not the bill I would have written. I would've spent far more money on infrastructure and shovel-ready projects, not funding for the National Endowment for the Arts and other extraneous parts. I also don't think we should be giving tax cuts to people who don't pay taxes."

Rep. Jeff Fortenberry, R-Neb., voted no. "I fear in the name of stimulus we are on an unsustainable path of spending that will be very difficult to reverse in the future."

Nevertheless, he too had some mixed feelings. "The alternative energy plan, health information technology, and modernizing the electric grid are bold, new ideas and standing alone, I probably would have voted for them."

Too Much, Too Late?

House Republicans balked at the stimulus package as they regain their small-government voice.

"Instead of injecting new life into the economy, we're seeing a massive expansion of government," Rep. Darrel Issa, R-Calif., wrote in an op-ed.

**Calling the bill "perfectly awful," Rep. John Campbell, R-Calif., said the "stimulus package is nothing more than a political grab bag of spending."**

But Small Business Committee Chairwoman Nydia Velazquez, D-Calif., said the bill would "drive growth within the small business community . . . \$30 billion in targeted tax measures will allow struggling startups to stay afloat."

Republicans say spending delays would limit the near-term impact.

A Congressional Budget Office report says just \$93 billion in new outlays would occur in the rest of fiscal 2009, which ends in Sept. 30. Another \$225 billion would be spent in 2010. All told, that's about half of the bill's eventual spending.

The Senate's stimulus bill is expected to include more tax cuts to Republicans' liking. That could win over more GOP support there.

No Bipartisan Spirit Here

One GOP aide cited partisanship as a reason for low House Republican support: "For all the president's calls to find an 'American' solution, Speaker Pelosi refused to allow any Republican input."

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer blamed Republicans. He cited Democrat cooperation with President Bush last year on economic plans and past GOP opposition to Clinton economic plans.

Fortenberry, while noting that the GOP was largely shut out by House Democrats, held out hope for long-term cooperation with Obama.

"President Obama came to see us Tuesday," he said. "It was a very cordial, gracious meeting in which there was honest and fair dialogue about areas of common ground regarding concern for the economy."

Common ground may be harder to find as more prominent economists oppose the stimulus package.

The libertarian Cato Institute on Tuesday ran a full-page ad in prominent papers, including the New York Times. Signed by 200 economists, including Nobel laureates Vernon Smith, James Buchanan and Edward Prescott, it stated that they "do not believe that more government spending is a way to improve economic performance."

"The package will simply put future generations of Americans \$800 billion further in debt," said Chris Edwards, director of tax policy studies at Cato. "We already have a deficit at a historic high and we cannot afford spending more."

But the bill has plenty of backers.

"We have to worry about budget deficits, but not anytime soon," said Dean Baker, co-director of the liberal Center for Economic and Policy Research. "The economy is in free fall. Spending money and running a large deficit will both get the economy on track and improve efficiency."